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ABSTRACT

A study of the goals of an accelerated composition and literature curriculum was subdivided into a "concurrence" strand designed to determine the agreement on course objectives by students, parents, and teachers, and an "attainment" strand to determine the extent to which students attained existing objectives. The study involved 269 tenth and eleventh grade students enrolled in an accelerated English program and 89 parents and teachers. After a pilot study, five course goals were defined for composition (composing/organizing, expository writing, mechanical skills, expressive/imaginative writing, and vocabulary development) and five for literature (literature as it reflects society, analysis of the author's craft, affective appreciation, evaluation, and personal relevance). A free-response instrument required participants to list important course objectives that were later tabulated and categorized under the ten goals. To measure their attainment, students took standardized vocabulary and reading comprehension tests and wrote expository themes. In addition, the themes of a sample of seven gifted pupils were examined for syntactical maturity. Responses showed significant agreement among the groups surveyed on course goals and satisfactory levels of student achievement. The mean scores of the seven gifted students showed a high level of attainment. The findings suggest that parents are a rich source of information and support in formulating or revising programs and that teachers were more interested in developing composition skills than in the literature program. (AEA)

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TWO STUDIES OF COMPOSITION AND LITERATURE OBJECTIVES FOR GIFTED AND ACADEMICALLY TALENTED PUPILS

N. C. Apple and P. O. Tierney

In light of renewed interest in the education of the gifted, a two-pronged investigation was undertaken to examine the instructional objectives of the Scholars English Program in the Pittsburgh Public School System. The program was introduced in the sixties at the time of the post-Sputnik commitment to a new and rigorous academic preparation for America's most talented youth. This investigation was designed to determine the answers to the following questions:

A. To what extent is there agreement or disagreement as to the objectives for composition and literature among the following five sources?

This report is based upon two dissertation completed under the direction of Allen Berger and JAck D. Birch at the University of Pittsburgh.

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1. Pupils enrolled in the Scholars English Program (grades 10 and 11) at Allderdice High School, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania

2. Parents of these pupils

3. Teachers who instruct these pupils in courses other than English

4. All Scholars English teachers in Pittsburgh Secondary Schools

5. Scholars English Curriculum, Grades 10 and 11

B. To what extent are the instructional objectives being attained?

The composition and literature investigation was subdivided into a concurrence study designed to detect the degree of agreement as to the literature and composition objectives as stated by pupils, parents and teachers, and an attainment study designed to determine the extent to which selected standardized tests, themes and course grades showed the pupils' attainment of the existing curriculum goals.

Site and Sample

Allderdice High School in Pittsburgh, the main site of the investigation, is an urban school which, in 1978, the year of the investigation, had a population of 2607 pupils from various socio-economic and religious backgrounds, with a racial mix of 23% black, 76% white and 1% other (Vietnamese and Chinese). A total of 896 pupils were enrolled in Scholars classes with 81% of this total electing Scholars English. Four of the six eleventh grade Scholars English classes and five of the seventeenth grade Scholars English classes were

selected for this study. In all, 269 Scholars English pupils participated in the investigation at Allderdice High School.

The Scholars Program is open to gifted and academically talented pupils. Admission is based upon multiple criteria: outstanding academic performance, an advanced level of achievement in reading or mathematics (a stanine of 7, 8 or 9 on the Metropolitan Achievement Test), teacher or counselor recommendation, psychological evaluation, group intelligence score, and specific academic aptitudes.

As defined in this investigation a gifted pupil is one admitted to the Scholars Program who met the criteria for giftedness of the Pennsylvania Department of Education—an IQ of 130 and above. An academically talented pupil is defined as one admitted to the program with an IQ under 130. Of the total sample of 269 pupils, 76, or 28% of the sample, were identified as gifted, and 193 were identified as academically talented.

Pilot Study

The method of data collection evolved from both a pilot study and a simulation of the investigation. For the pilot study, conducted in 1977, selected Scholars English teachers who had convened for a workshop to update the original curriculum were given a checklist inquiry. The list was composed of existing course objectives as taken from the curriculum guides. The 13 teachers were asked to determine how they valued each objective on a four-point scale ranging from very important to not important.

About the same time four Scholars English classes

(two tenth grade and two eleventh) did a similar rating of existing objectives. Like the teachers, most of the pupils ranked each objective "very important" or "important."

We then asked students, teachers and parents, in an informal manner, to list objectives which they thought to be important to a Scholars English program. The results of this simulation indicated that such a free response inquiry would yield rich, varied responses. This free response format was later modified to include a sample objective in order to give some clarification to those who were not sure what an "objective" was.

The Concurrence Study

The free-response inquiry evolving from the simulation study was given to all participants: the 269 tenth and eleventh grade Scholars pupils, their parents, their teachers in subjects other than English, and all Scholars English teachers in [Pittsburgh] High Schools. On two separate forms each person was asked to list at least four objectives for composition and four for literature. They were also asked to rank their responses in order of importance. Table 1 shows the number and percentages of replies received.

(Insert Table 1 here)

The percentage of responses was disappointing for some groups, perhaps because the mailing was done in May when the semester was almost over and because the inquiry took some time and effort to complete; nevertheless, approximately 2100 responses were tabulated and categorized.

Composition. From the 1067 usable replies, and

based upon research in writing, five categories emerged: 1) Composing/Organizing (which dealt with formulating ideas and composing the paper in some organized way); 2) Mechanical Skills (which referred to the rules of traditional grammar, including correct usage, punctuation, sentence structure and spelling); 3) Vocabulary Development (which included learning new words, word choice, diction, or improving standardized test scores); 4) Expository Writing (which referred to learning to write an expository essay, or some part of it—a topic sentence, a good conclusion—or objectives referring to research papers or other varieties of exposition); and 5) Expressive/Imaginative Writing (which included "creative writing" such as short stories, description, poetry, and those replies which suggested "free" writing without constraints as to topic or style).

Literature. The literature categories were adapted from the Purves and Rippere (1968) and Purves and Beach Schemata (1972) after determining that the schemata were appropriate for the 989 usable responses to the literature inquiry. These categories were also consistent with the stated curriculum objectives. The emerging five categories: 1) Affective appreciation (referring to the affective or emotional response to literature); 2) Analysis of the author's craft (referring to learnings about the techniques used by the author—figures of speech, symbolism, tone, atmosphere); 3) Evaluation (expressing a need for guidelines to use for judging the quality of literature); 4) Literature as it reflects society (indicating the importance of placing a piece

of literature in a specific time period, politically, socially, or historically); and 5) Personal relevance (expressing a desire to identify with characters or to use literature as a means for personal growth and development).

Rater Reliability. To determine whether the category descriptions were defined so that other raters could replicate the categorization, the following procedure was used:

1. Three English teachers were asked to read the descriptions of the categories given.

2. The teacher raters were given a series of 15 simulated objectives to classify. Their ratings of these objectives were consistent.

3. An unbiased sample, consisting of 15 inquiry forms, was given to the teachers for classification.

When the results were tabulated the average percentage of agreement between rates for both composition and literature objectives was A-B, 91%; B-C, 90%; A-C, 94%, indicating that, with training, different raters could categorize the responses consistently.

Results of the Concurrence Study

The objectives were grouped and ranked according to the frequency with which they were listed by each respondent group. At this time we decided to divide the pupils into subsets based upon grade level and IQ (gifted and academically talented) to determine differences in their responses. A priority table was constructed to illustrate the rank order of importance accorded to the objectives listed. There was al-

most perfect agreement between the frequency and priority rankings indicating that those objectives listed most often were those most valued by the respondent groups.

To determine the degree of concurrence among the four groups, Kendall's coefficient of concordance was calculated for the rank orders. The results are significant at the .01 level of confidence showing a concurrence among the groups as to the following order of priority:

Composition Objectives

1. Composing/Organizing
2. Expository Writing
3. Mechanical Skills
4. Expressive/Imaginative Writing
5. Vocabulary Development

Literature Objectives

1. Literature as it reflects society
2. Analysis of the author's craft
3. Affective appreciation
4. Evaluation
5. Personal relevance

(Insert Table 2)

To examine the differences among subsets of pupils and the other groups, pairs of rankings were compared using Spearman's rank correlation coefficient (Siegel, 1956). In spite of the overall concurrence of the four major groups, there was no significant correlation of rankings for any pair of major groups for composition objectives and for literature objectives there was significant concurrence only

between parents and other teachers. These differences between groups could have important implications for actual classroom practice. Scholars English teachers and gifted eleventh grade pupils, for example, both ranked Expressive/Imaginative Writing higher than the other groups. This suggests that individual priorities should also be considered in setting instructional objectives.

A comparison of the Scholars curricular objectives with the objectives obtained from the four respondent groups shows that the following four composition categories were found in the curriculum: Composing/Organizing, Expository Writing, Expressive/Imaginative Writing and Vocabulary Development. There were no explicit curricula objectives for Mechanical skills, which was ranked third in the composite rankings of the four groups. All of the literature objectives were found in the curricula.

The Attainment Study

To measure their attainment, Scholars pupils took a standardized test in vocabulary and reading comprehension and wrote expository themes. In addition the themes of a sample of seven gifted pupils were examined for syntactical maturity. The vocabulary and reading comprehension sub-tests were selected from the Iowa Silent Reading Tests, Level 3, Form E (1973). The choice of these sub-tests reflected the belief that the pupils need a vocabulary competence and reading comprehension of an average or higher level in order to be effective in dealing with the Scholars course of Study: Level 3 of the ISRT was developed for use with academically

accelerated eleventh and twelfth graders and with college students (Manual, ISRT, L973). The raw scores achieved on the test were converted to standardized scores by grade level representing norms for the entire school population. The test results were also compared with students in the college preparatory course of study as the Scholars Program is intended to serve as a college preparatory curriculum.

Results of the Attainment Study

Since there are no established norms for these pupils locally, we decided that the gifted Scholars (those with IQ's over 130), who represented 33% of grade 10 and 30% of grade 11, should score in the above average range—from the 77th to the 99th percentile; and that the Scholars pupils designated as academically talented (those with IQ's under 130), who represented 67% of the tenth grade and 70% of grade 11, should score in the high average range—from the 60th to th 76th percentile. The results on the reading comprehension and vocabulary tests showed that the pupils' scores were within these guidelines.

(Insert Table 3)

The sample expository theme written by each pupil in response to literature was given a dual grade by each of three English teachers: the content grade included topic sentence, organization, supporting evidence, adequate conclusion, and style; the mechanics grade included sentence structure, appropriateness of vocabulary, usage, punctuation, spelling, and capitalization. Using a grading scale from 1 (low) to 5 (high), the results are presented:

(Insert Table 4)

In each case, the gifted pupils have highter averages than the academically talented pupils. Using a *t* test the differences in means between these groups were found to be significant at the .01 level.

Attainment of Seven Gifted Pupils

To obtain addition information about the achievement of the gifted, a sample of seven gifted pupils, representing 10% of the gifted pupil total, was selected for further analysis.

Hunt's T-unit (Hunt, 1965) and Dilworth et al's (1978) levels of abstraction were used to evaluate the writing of this sample. The average number of words per T-unit for the seven students was 15.0, placing then on the level of skilled adult, according to Hunt's scale. Their average number of high level abstract statements was 6.4, compared with an average of 3.8 for the superior papers in Dilworth's study. While the sample of gifted is small, and the results of each individual score are tentative, the total scores from IQ's, teacher grades, ISRT scores, and theme evaluations all support a significantly higher level of attainment for the gifted pupils.

(Insert Table 5)

Conclusions

The concurrence study showed significant agreement among the four groups surveyed (pupils, their parents, other Scholars English teachers, and teachers of other subjects) as to the objectives and their priorities for both the composition and literature programs in Scholars English.

The curricular objectives were not ranked in order of importance. Therefore, a comparison was made between the categories of objectives chosen by the respondent groups and similar objectives found in the curriculum. There was agreement in all categories except Mechanical Skills for which no explicit goals were listed in the curriculum.

The attainment study showed satisfactory levels of achievement using teacher grades, scores on nationally standardized tests, and grades on expository themes as the criteria.

On every measure the mean scores for the seven gifted pupils showed a high level of attainment. Current measures of syntactical maturity, however, do not appear to be suitable for measuring the quality of a pupil's writing once a reasonable fluency has been acquired. We compared selected expository themes written by the pupils with paragraphs written by Bellow, Hemingway, James, and Twain. Neither Hemingway nor Twain would have been classified as skilled adults if the same measure of attainment were used.

Implications

As the public demands accountability, it behooves educational policy makers to learn what parents, pupils, and teachers expect from the educational process.

Indeed, parents are a rich source of information and support in formulating or revising programs. The inclusion of parental conferences in designing the Individualized Educational Programs (IEP's) by federal and state laws is sound educational policy.

Teachers of subjects other than English are another valuable resource for planning objectives. The teachers become more aware of the English program when pupils in their course fail to complete assignments successfully. The free response inquiry was shown to be a useful method of obtaining information. Teachers indicated a stronger interest in developing composition skills than in the literature program, yet the present curricular objectives suggest that students have already mastered these fundamentals.

The NCTE guidelines for teacher training (NCTE, 1977) place less emphasis upon a strong academic background than did the 1967 guidelines, but there is more emphasis upon individualized instruction, field experience, and responsiveness to minority needs. For teachers of the talented and gifted, both emphases are needed. The strong endorsement of traditional values in the priorities established for composition and literature requires a broad background in literature and writing in various modes.

Expanded opportunities for independent research could be provided so that pupils can pursue individual interests. Schools can utilize the resources of their communities to provide cooperative programs with local universities, internships with local arts councils, theater groups or newspapers. Such programs add a valuable dimension to the education of gifted as well as all students.

In the only survey of the first Scholars graduates in Pittsburgh (Glassner, 1971), respondents suggested that the program be modified so that students could take one or

two Scholars classes instead of the whole program, which included every academic subject. This change was made. Avoiding isolation and elitism is critical in a program for gifted and academically talented pupils.

Suggestions for Further Research

How to establish criteria for English objectives (Cooper, 1977) is a persistent problem. Should objectives be stated in general or behavioral terms? Or should they be stated in terms of higher mental processes (Bloom, 1956)? For gifted pupils, a measure such as level of abstraction might be a fruitful area for research. In addition, no longitudinal study has been undertaken of the composing process nor of the response to literature of the gifted pupil. Such research would provide insights to educators in designing programs. Periodic curriculum reviews would provide further data for program improvements.

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Table 1

Numbers and Percentages of Replies from Each Group Surveyed

Group	Number Contacted	Number Responding	Response Rate	Average Number of Objectives Per Respondent: Composition	Literature
1. Scholars Pupils					
Grade 10 Gifted	43	37	86%	2.82	3.21
Grade 10 Talented[a]	100	94	94%	2.77	3.05
All Grade 10	143	131	92%	2.78	3.10
Grade 11 Gifted	33	23	70%	2.56	3.00
Grade 11 Talented[a]	93	71	76%	2.97	3.03
All Grade 11	126	94	75%	2.85	3.02
All Gifted	76	60	79%	2.71	3.13
All Talented[a]	193	165	85%	2.84	3.04
All Pupils	269	225	84%	2.80	3.07
2. Parents of Scholars	269	53[b]	20%	3.25	1.75
3. Scholars English Teachers	50	21	42%	2.87	3.80
4. Other Teachers	55	15	27%	3.06	2.47

[a]Talented refers to academically talented.

[b]Three listed themselves as "Mr. and Mrs."

Table 2

Rankings of Composition and Literature Objectives by Respondent Groups Used to Calculate Kendall's Coefficient of Concordance

Category	Parents	Pupils	Scholars English Teachers	Other Teachers	Sum of Ranks
Composition					
Composing/Organizing	5	5	5	3	18
Mechanical Skills	4	3	2	5	14
Vocabulary Development	1	2	1	2	6
Expository Writing	3	4	4	4	15
Expressive/Imaginative Writing	2	1	3	1	7
					60
Literature					
Affective Appreciation	3	2	2	3.5	10.5
Analysis of Author's Craft	4	5	5	3.5	17.5
Evaluation	2	1	3	2	8
Literature as a Reflection of Society	5	4	4	5	18
Personal Relevance	1	3	1	1	6
					60

Note: Kendall's coefficient of concordance equals 0.69 for Composition, 0.75 for Literature ($p<0.01$, Siegel, 1956, p. 286)

Table 3

Scores Obtained by Each Pupil Group on Vocabulary and on Reading Comprehension (Tests 1 and 2, Iowa Silent Reading Tests)

Vocabulary	Gifted Grade 10	Academically Talented Grade 10	Gifted Grade 11	Academically Talented Grade 11
Mean	82.8	64.5	86.4	86.6
Median	90.0	64.0	94.0	70.0
Reading Comprehension				
Mean	84.7	63.3	89.5	61.6
Median	93.5	65.0	93.5	64.0

Table 4

Scores Obtained by Each Pupil Group on Written Compositions

Content	Gifted Grade 10	Academically Talented Grade 10	Gifted Grade 11	Academically Talented Grade 11
Mean Grade	3.25	2.95	3.81	3.09
Mechanics				
Mean grade	3.39	2.98	3.72	3.18

Table 5

Measures of Attainment for Seven Gifted Pupils

	Pupil							
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Mean
IQ	141	130	153	137	134	131	159	141
Current English Grade	A	B	A	A	A	B	B	A-
QPA[a]	4.0	2.6	3.8	3.4	3.4	3.0	2.8	3.29
ISRT[b]								
Vocabulary Percentile	95	76	73	86	84	98	99	87.3
Reading Comprehension Percentile	99+	c	98	55	95	95	c	88.4
Content/Mechanics								
Reader 1	4/4	3/4	5/5	4/3	4/3	3/4	4/3	3.9/3.7
Reader 2	4/4	3/3	5/4	4/3	5/4	3/3	4/4	4.0/3.6
Reader 3	4/4	3/4	5/5	4/4	4/4	3/4	3/3	3.9/4.0
Words/T-unit[d]								
Beginning 10th	13.3	10.8	20.0	12.0	15.7	11.6	16.5	14.3
Middle 10th	16.4	11.0	18.0	17.0	14.0	13.6	18.9	15.6
End 10th Grade	14.0	10.1	14.0	16.0	19.0	13.3	18.4	15.0
Middle 11th	18.0	10.4	16.6	15.4	14.9	15.2	15.5	15.1
Average	15.4	10.5	17.1	15.1	15.9	13.4	17.3	15.0
Number of Abstract T-units								
Level 1	8	8	3	10	12	4	1	5.0
Level 2	4	6	11	10	5	7	9	7.4
Level 3	7	7	7	6	7	4	7	6.4

[a] QPA based upon final semester grades in all tenth grade subjects.

[b] Iowa Silent Reading Test (1973). Percentile reference group was other tenth grade pupils enrolled in college preparatory courses.

[c] Pupil was absent when test was given.

[d] Hunt's scale of syntactic maturity (Hunt, Cooper, and Odell, 1977). Hunt reports the following average words/T-unit: grade 10, 10.4; grade 12, 11.3; average adult, 11.9; skilled adult, 14.8.